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Progress Report

Archeological Excavations at Fort Frederick  
Fort Frederick State Park  
Washington County  
Maryland

prepared for

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by

National Heritage Corporation  
309 North Matlack Street  
West Chester, Pennsylvania

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Progress Report Number Three



This is the third in a series of bi-weekly reports intended to keep the Department informed on a timely basis of the progress of archeological investigations at Fort Frederick, Maryland. It is hoped that the preparation of these reports will allow a periodic review of the excavation progress as well as an opportunity to contribute to the formulation of the strategy employed in the satisfaction of project objectives. Progress reports will focus upon a description of work completed, preliminary interpretations, and excavation strategy.



## PROGRESS REPORT

This report was initially intended to summarize work completed during the final three weeks of field investigations at Fort Frederick, May 23 through June 10, 1977. The report has been expanded, however, to include an unanticipated one week extension of fieldwork, terminating on June 17, 1977. Excavation during this four week period was focused upon a continuation of the work being undertaken within the southwest bastion as well as upon a testing of the area outside the west curtain wall of the fort.

It was reported in Progress Report Number Two (May 21, 1977) that two trenches had been excavated outside the fort, perpendicular to the north curtain wall. Further note was made of the absence of any evidence of exterior fortifications in those units. In conjunction with backhoe excavations outside the west curtain wall, described in the following paragraphs, the longest of the two north trenches was extended to a total length of sixty-seven feet, still revealing no evidence of exterior fortifications. As with the first section of the trench, sterile subsoil appeared at a very shallow depth - less than one foot beneath the present surface. Artifacts were almost totally absent, and the slit trenches excavated by the C.C.C., so common in the interior of the fort, were not encountered in the area outside the north wall.

In an effort to determine the eighteenth century configuration of the area outside the west wall of the fort, five trenches were excavated by means of a backhoe. The trenches were aligned perpendicular to the west curtain wall and placed at intervals of seventy feet. Figure I illustrates the exact position of the trenches, designated West Trench I through West Trench 5 beginning with the southernmost trench. The trenches are, in addition, aligned with the overall site grid.

Careful examination of the stratigraphic sections in each trench failed to yield any evidence of exterior fortifications at Fort Frederick. Cultural deposits are, however, somewhat more extensive than was the case with the trenches in the area north of the fort, and artifact recovery was correspondingly greater. The artifacts and features noted in the five trenches were generally indicative of nineteenth century activities and contrasted markedly with the material recovered from the various units within the southwest bastion. Given the manner in which the trenches were excavated (i.e., with a backhoe) it was impossible to correlate artifacts with specific strata. West Trench 5, located adjacent to the northwest bastion, yield the most evidence of nineteenth century activities, this in the form of assorted artifacts together with pit and trench-like features. A nineteenth century roadway, marked by cobbles and cinders, was also found at the western end of this trench. C.C.C. activity was noted in the trenches close to the wall of the fort, mostly in the form of clay fill measuring



approximately six inches in depth. Slit trenches were not encountered.

In summary, excavations outside the north and west walls of the fort indicate an absence of traditional exterior fortifications such as a ditch or glacis. The absence of such evidence does not entirely rule out all possibility of some sort of outer fortification, however, as this might have taken the form of a simple wooden palisade or a system of detached redouts, either of which could have conceivably been missed by the backhoe trenches.

Within the southwest bastion attention was focused largely upon an investigation of peripheral areas in an attempt to retrieve additional information regarding the nature and configuration of parapet construction. At the same time, the excavation of two squares in the central area of the bastion was completed in order to answer questions which had been generated by the investigation of contiguous areas. (A preliminary excavation plan is included as a locational reference for the units discussed below.)

The excavation of Square N8E8, undertaken in an attempt to determine the relationship between the deposits in the southwest bastion and those in the central area of the fort, was completed with the removal of a comparatively thin seventeenth century deposit of dark brown humic soil. This layer was overlain directly by a sterile deposit of reddish yellow clay deposited by the C.C.C. (this same clay deposit is also found in the central area of the fort), and contained such items as fragments of bottle glass and seventeenth century ceramics, in addition to faunal remains. The absence of any intervening soil accumulation between the seventeenth century layer and the sterile clay fill lends further support to the hypothesized removal of overburden from the southwest bastion by the C.C.C. during the 1930's.

Square N5E5 was excavated in an effort to define the relationship between the thick eighteenth century trash deposit encountered in N5E6 and the culturally sterile fill which lines the periphery of the bastion. While this relationship was somewhat obscured by the presence of a C.C.C. slit trench, it appears that the trash deposit simply overlaps, in an accumulative fashion, the sloping surface of the sterile fill. Of more interest and importance, however, is the discovery of three large stones resting upon the 1756 humic surface in an east-west alignment. These stones served a retaining function between culturally sterile fill on their north side and a humus accumulation on the south. In other words, the sterile fill protruded further into the center of the bastion on the north than it did on the south side of these large stones. The significance of this configuration is not yet understood, but a careful review of comparative publications may permit a tentative interpretation.



Investigation of the periphery of the bastion was begun with the excavation of square N4E8. Located close to the south wall of the bastion, culturally sterile fill was encountered immediately beneath the present topsoil, except in the northwest corner of the unit where a thin layer of eighteenth century humic soil was sloping sharply toward the center of the bastion. Stratigraphically, it appears that soil has been removed from the surface in this area, probably during the 1930's. Perhaps as a result of soil removal, a careful examination of the surface of the sterile fill revealed no evidence of postmolds or other features which might have been related to parapet construction. Examination of the 1756 humus level, beneath the sterile fill, likewise revealed neither evidence relating to parapet construction, nor even artifacts which might have been deposited during the construction of the fort.

Squares N5E10 and N6E10 were excavated against the east wall of the bastion in a further attempt to recover evidence of parapet construction as well as to examine the configuration and depth of the footing of the bastion wall. As in N4E8, culturally sterile fill appeared immediately beneath present topsoil and this fill, in turn, overlaid the 1756 humus layer. While no features could be discerned on the surface of the sterile fill (once again, soil removal by the C.C.C. is likely in this area), an unusual feature did appear at the level of the 1756 humus in both units. Oriented on an axis roughly parallel with that of the west curtain wall of the fort, a series of small parallel furrows filled with hard-packed gray soil were discovered just inside the bastion wall. Careful examination of the feature revealed a configuration suggesting a parallel alignment of small logs, long since decomposed and replaced with soil. Two possibilities exist: first, that this feature predates and is, thus, unrelated to the fort or, second, that it was somehow related to fort construction. The presence of sterile fill immediately above the feature (fill thought to have been deposited in 1756) argues against the feature having served any function following fort construction. While a similar feature was discovered at Fort Ligonier and interpreted as a service trench leading from a powder magazine to a battery (Grimm 1970:31), the feature in question at Fort Frederick is not associated with a trench.

In order to further investigate the above-mentioned feature, an additional week of investigation was financed by the Maryland Park Service. During this period, two small units, each measuring 3 x 8 feet, were excavated perpendicular to the north wall of the bastion in order to determine the presence or absence of an analogous and symmetrically placed feature. No such feature was discovered. Additionally, two units of the same size were excavated in Squares N7E10 and N9E10 in an effort to determine the northward extent of the feature. Fortunately, the feature ended near the north edge of Square N9E10. It is significant that in both units, the feature was



found beneath a thin deposit of eighteenth century humic soil and, further, that it was not associated with other features.

Finally, Square N4E3 was excavated against the west wall of the bastion in order to determine the depth and configuration of the wall footing. In contrast with the east wall of the bastion, the footing for which appeared at a depth of about two feet, the footing for the west wall was discovered at a depth of three feet.

Surprisingly, stratigraphic evidence in this unit indicates that soil was not removed from the surface by the C.C.C., at least not to the extent indicated by the stratigraphic profiles from units along the east side of the bastion. No evidence was found, however, for parapet construction.

Following the completion of field investigations at Fort Frederick, all artifactual and faunal material was washed and inventoried. Arrangements are currently being made for faunal analysis and a selection of metal items for conservation has been made. Stratigraphic profiles for selected units will be prepared for the final report in the format illustrated by the enclosed example (constructive criticism of this format is welcome) and a single site matrix will be constructed in order to chronologically integrate all excavated strata.



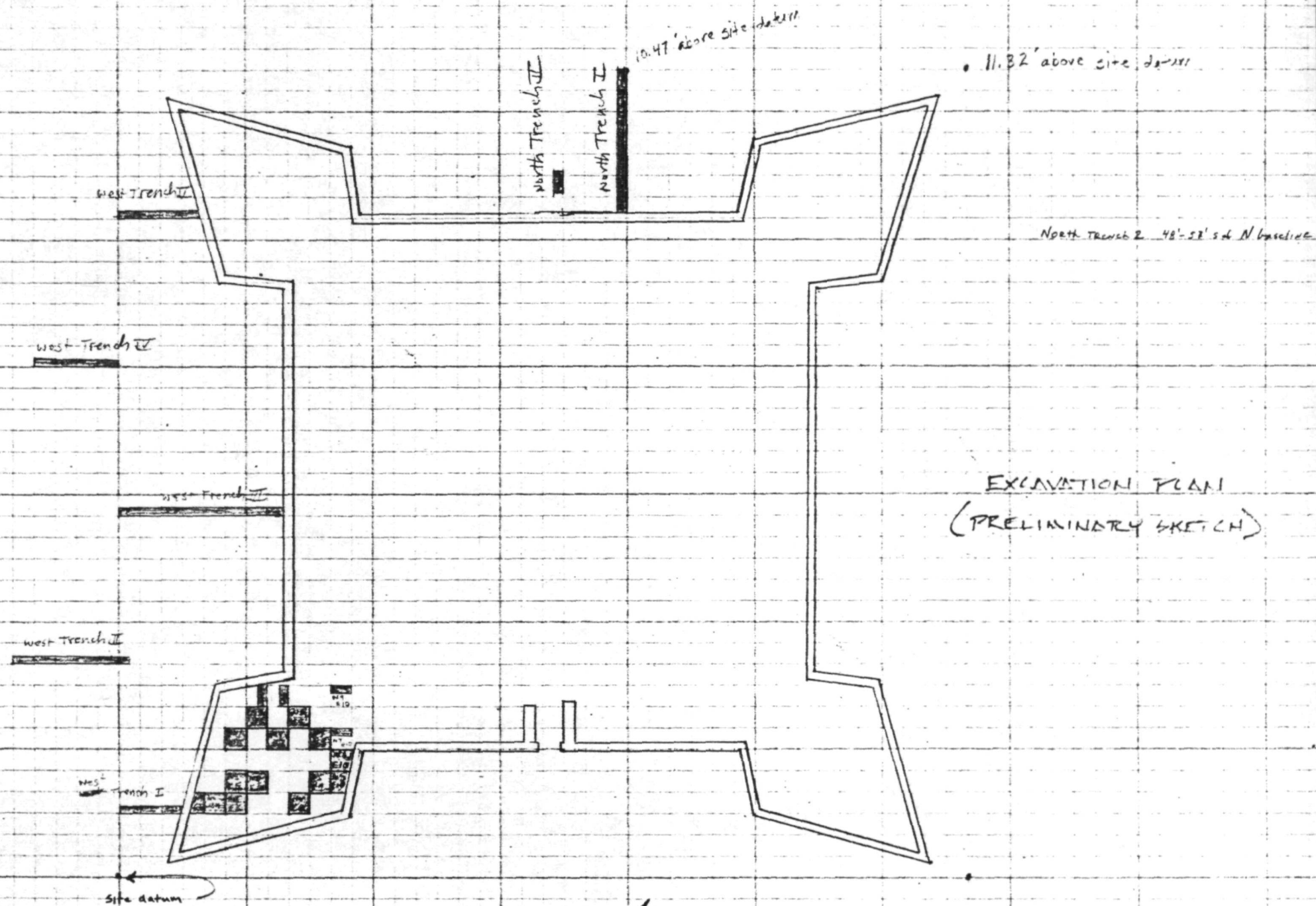
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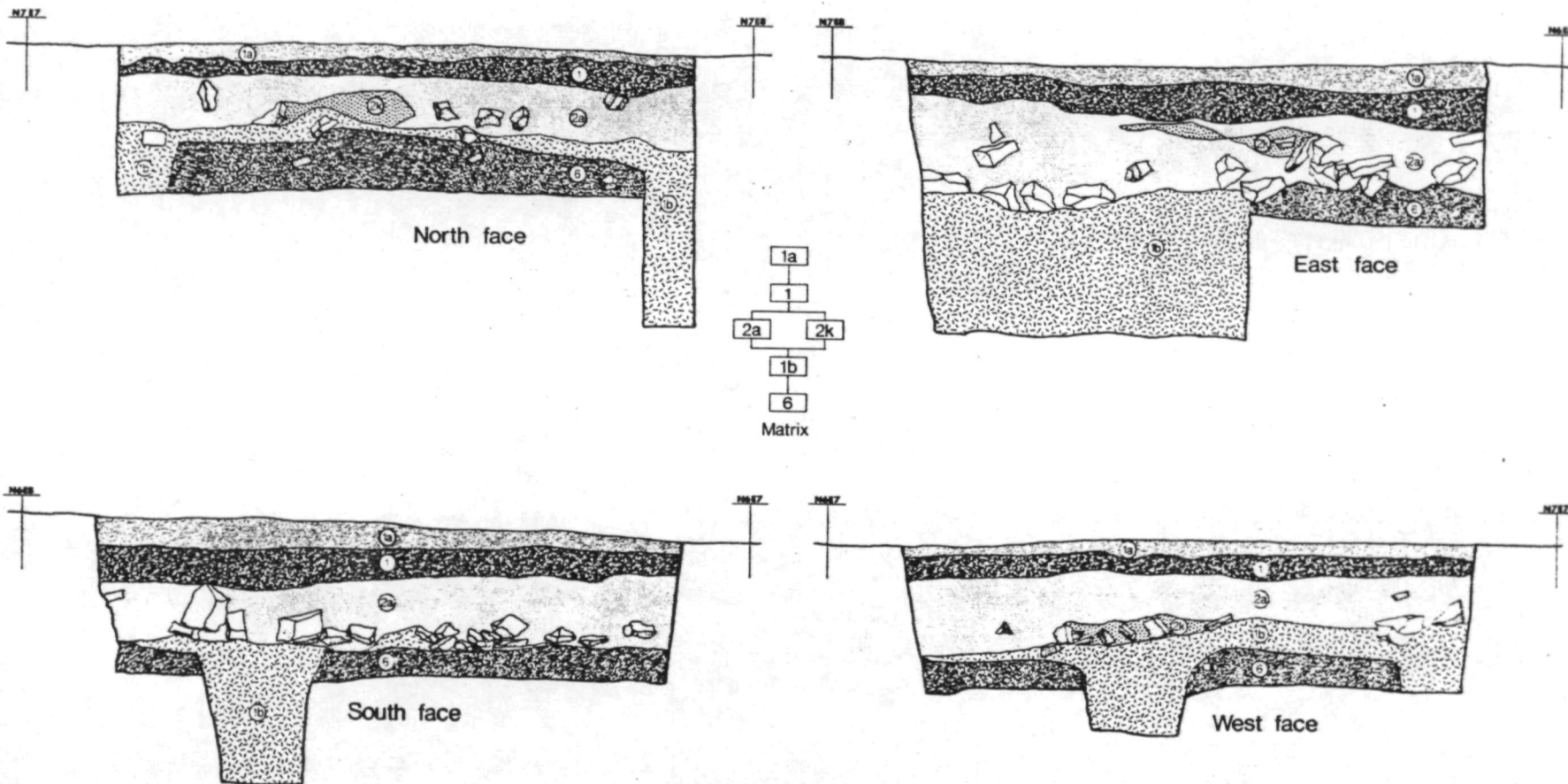




EXCAVATION PLAN  
(PRELIMINARY SKETCH)

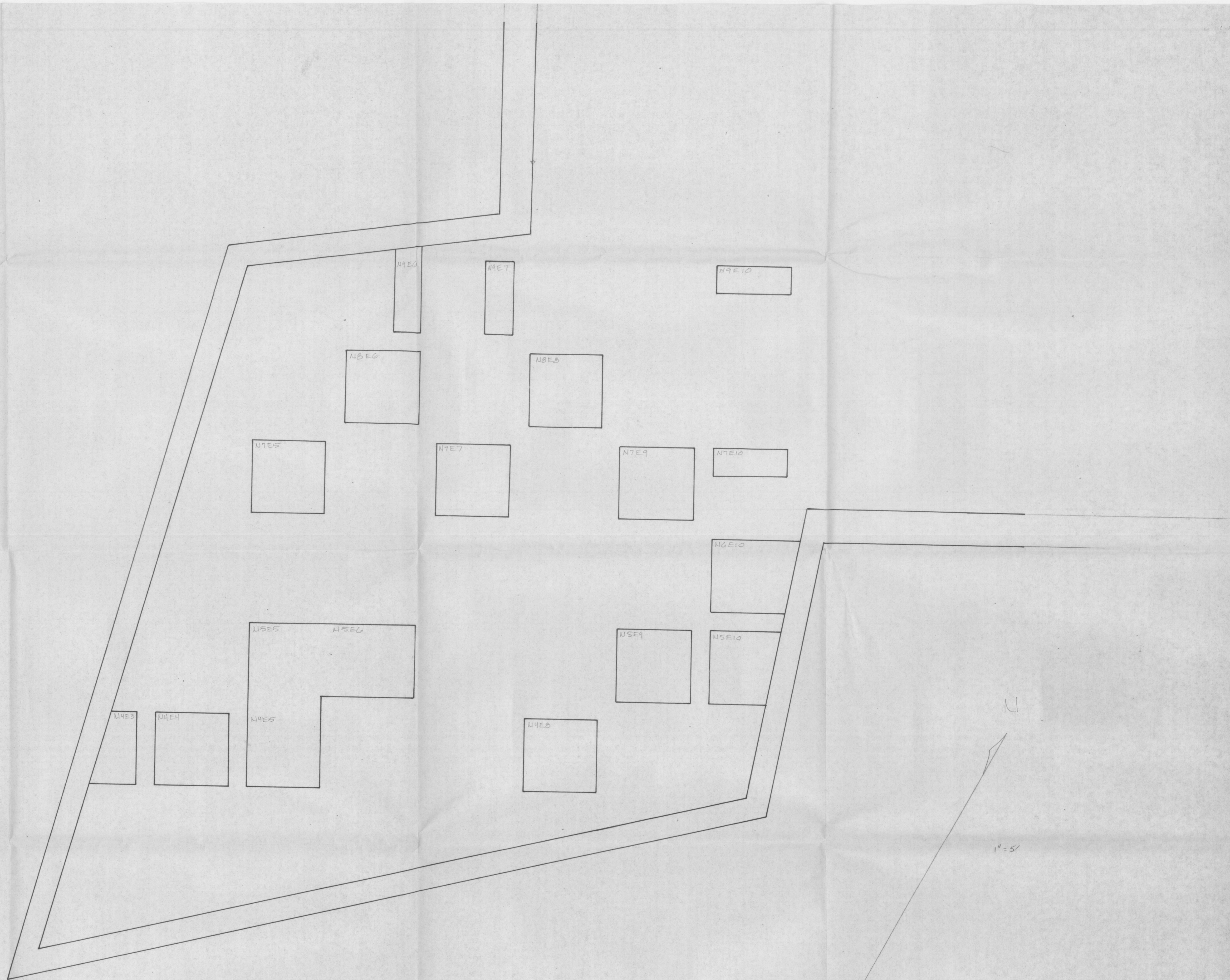
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SQUARE N7E7  
Profile sheet





+ SITE DATUM